SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*[*]

WHAT I shall try to do in this lecture is to examine some features of Shakespeare's comic art in one particular example. It may seem temerity enough to have chosen *Twelfth Night*; but since a dramatist, after all, even Shakespeare, is made as well as born, and it is interesting to see, if indeed one ever can, how his art perfects itself, I shall also venture from time to time some comparison between *Twelfth Night* and one of the earlier comedies of Shakespeare which led up to it.

In a book on *Twelfth Night* published four years ago Dr. Leslie Hotson suggested that the play was written to compliment an Italian nobleman, Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano, in a court entertainment given for him on Twelfth Night, 1601, and that it was after this Orsino that one of the principal characters was named. I am not sure that the Italian Orsino would have felt complimented by seeing himself portrayed as a handsome and poetical but ineffective lover, and I do not think that Queen Elizabeth would have witnessed the play with delight if she had agreed with Dr. Hotson that the lady Olivia in the play was intended to represent her. But even if *Twelfth Night* were the play with which the Queen entertained the Italian Duke, it would not be necessary to suppose with Dr. Hotson that Shakespeare wrote it in ten or eleven days.[1] It is true that the Lord Chamberlain made a memorandum to arrange with the players "to make choice of" a play that would be "most pleasing to her Majesty" on this occasion,[2] but "to make choice of a play" is not quite the same thing as instructing the players to get up a new one.

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The most interesting thing of course is that in however short a time Shakespeare ultimately wrote this play, he had in a sense been composing it during most of the previous decade. It was several years before the Twelfth Night entertainment of 1601—certainly not later than 1594—that Shakespeare first wrote a play about identical twins who were separated from one another in a shipwreck and afterwards mistaken for one another even by the wife of one of them; and it was at a similarly early stage in his career that Shakespeare wrote another play about a woman who served her lover as a page, and who in her page's disguise carried messages of love from her lover to another woman. When Shakespeare makes these things happen in *Twelfth Night* he is, in fact, combining the plots of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* He does not, however, combine them in equal degree. The heartsick heroine who in page's disguise takes messages of love to another woman provided little more than an episode in the complicated relations of the two gentlemen of Verona; but in *Twelfth Night* this episode has grown into the central situation from which the play draws its life. On the other hand, the confusion of twins which entertained us for five acts of *The Comedy of Errors* appears now as little more than an adroit device to bring about a happy ending. These shifts of emphasis show clearly enough the direction that Shakespeare's art of comedy has taken. When Sebastian appears in *Twelfth Night* we see that Shakespeare can still delight in the jolly mix-up of mistaken identities, not to mention their consequence of broken pates, but his plot now gives chief attention to the delineation of romantic love. This is more than just a preference for one situation rather than another: it means that a plot which turns on external appearances—a

resemblance between men's faces—gives way to an action which involves their feelings. In *The Comedy of Errors,* though the physical resemblance between twins is no doubt a fact of nature, the confusion is really the result of accidental circumstances and is as accidentally cleared up. But in *Twelfth Night* the confusion is in the emotions and no *dénouement* is possible until the characters have grown in insight to the point where they can acknowledge the feelings that nature has planted in them. Thus *Twelfth Night* exhibits in its action one of the fundamental motifs of comedy: the education of a man or woman. For a comedy, as everyone knows, is a play in which the situation holds some threat of disaster but issues in the achievement of happiness; and those comedies may satisfy us most deeply in which danger is averted and happiness achieved through something that takes place within the characters. Orsino and Olivia come to their happy ending when they have learnt a new attitude to others and to themselves.

This, I take it, is what is also meant to happen in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the much misunderstood conclusion of that play. Proteus, significantly named for his fickle nature, has vexed the critics by coming into a happiness he seems to have done nothing to deserve. But the point is that when his best friend has denounced him as a "treacherous man" and his mistress has rebuked him for his changeableness, he can penitently say, "O heaven, were man but constant he were perfect." This has struck some as complacent; but it is not to be taken lightly. For it means that Proteus has now learnt the value of constancy, the very virtue he conspicuously lacked. This is what the play set out to teach him and it is only when he has learnt it that he can say, "Bear witness, Heaven, I have my wish for ever," express-

ing simultaneously a sense of the happiness he is granted and a vow of constancy in future. It is true that in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare did not allow himself scope to develop all the implications of Proteus's fickleness and reform; but such a story of treachery, if fully explored, might strike too deep for comedy. *Twelfth Night* has no unfaithful lover. But it cannot escape notice that Orsino's love is repeatedly compared to the sea—vast, hungry, but unstable, while his mind appears to Feste like an opal, a jewel of magical but ever-changing colours. The changeable man is there, but he has undergone a subtle transformation, and to notice this is, I think, of far more importance than to object, as Charlotte Lennox did in the eighteenth century, that Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* has ruined the story of Bandello which she regarded as "undoubtedly" Shakespeare's source.[3] Shakespeare, she objects, deprives the story of probability because he neglects to provide his characters with acceptable motives. Viola, she says, "all of a sudden takes up an unaccountable resolution to serve the young bachelor-duke in the habit of a man." And since Viola has not even the excuse of being in love with the duke to start with, this goes "greatly beyond the bounds of decency." But if Shakespeare had wanted to make Viola assume her man's disguise because she was already in love with Orsino, he did not need Bandello to teach him; he had already tried that situation with Julia and Proteus, and it had necessarily involved Proteus in that heartless infidelity from which Orsino is to be spared. The emotional situation of *Twelfth Night* is of a much less obvious kind.

The most important source for *Twelfth Night*, one might therefore say, is *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. For it is only by a paradox of scholarship that the word *source* is usually

restricted to material that an author draws on from someone else's work. But that there were other sources for *Twelfth Night* I readily admit.[4] Charlotte Lennox knew of one in Bandello. And long before that one of Shakespeare's own contemporaries had pointed to another. When John Manningham saw *Twelfth Night* in 1602, he said in his Diary that it reminded him of an Italian play called *Gl'Inganni* (or *The Mistakes*). There were at least two plays of this title that Shakespeare might have used, and in one of them the heroine, on disguising herself as a page, assumed the name Cesare, which may well be why Shakespeare's Viola elects to call herself Cesario. There was also another Italian play called *Gl'Ingannati* (or *The Mistaken*), in which the master told the page, "You are a child, you do not know the force of love," and Shakespeare's Orsino of course is always similarly reminding Cesario of his uninitiated youth. So the nineteenth-century scholar, Joseph Hunter, perhaps influenced by the fact that he discovered it, found in this play *Gl'Ingannati* "the true origin" of Shakespeare's. Collier, however, asserted that it was from an English tale by Barnabe Riche, called *Apolonius and Silla,* that Shakespeare drew his plot. Furness was equally certain that he did not, but as he hoped that Shakespeare had never looked into Riche's "coarse, repulsive novel,"[5] perhaps this also was not quite an impartial judgment.

For my part I find no difficulty in agreeing with those modern scholars who assume that Shakespeare was familiar with all these versions of a story in which a woman disguised as a page pleads her lover's suit with another woman, who then falls in love with the page. But that Shakespeare read up these plays and novels for the express purpose of writing his own play is perhaps another matter. The similari-

ties between Shakespeare and these others are certainly interesting; yet to point out similarities will usually end in drawing attention to their difference. For instance, *Twelfth Night* seems to echo Riche's tale when Olivia, declaring her unrequited love for Cesario, says she has "laid" her "honour too unchary out."[6] But in Riche the lady said that she had "charily preserved" her "honour." The phrasing is reminiscent; but Riche's lady boasts of her honour after she has sacrificed her chastity, while Shakespeare's Olivia reproaches herself for being careless of her honour when her chastity of course is not in question. Riche's lady is anxious lest she has lost her reputation in the eyes of the world, Olivia lest she has fallen from her own high ideal of conduct. Without accepting Furness's view that any reference to the act of sex is coarse and repulsive, we may easily find it significant that Shakespeare leaves it out. His delineation of Olivia's love for the page, in contrast to most of the earlier versions, omits all the physical demonstrations. The usual way when the lady falls in love with the page is for her to astonish him by falling on his neck and kissing him. In Secchi's play of *Gl'Inganni* the relations between them reach the point where the woman page is expected to play the man's part in an actual assignation and she gets out of it by the cunning substitution of her brother. In the play of *Gl'Ingannati,* which comes closer to Shakespeare, the lady takes the brother by mistake, but he goes to bed with her just the same. In Riche's story this incident has consequences, which force the lady so chary of her honour to demand marriage of the page, who can only establish innocence by the disclosure of *her* sex. Shakespeare appropriates this convenient brother as a husband for Olivia, but since he could easily have invented Viola's twin, and in *The Comedy of Errors* had, one might

say, already tried him out, this debt is not a profound one. What is more remarkable, the similarity as usual embracing a contrast, is that when Olivia mistakes Sebastian for Cesario she takes him not to bed but to a priest. Olivia no less than Orsino is kept free of moral taint. And this is no mere matter of prudishness. The reckless abandonment of scruple shown by all these earlier lovers—both by the gentlemen who desert their mistresses and the ladies who fling themselves upon the page-boys—cannot co-exist with the more delicate sentiment which gives *Twelfth Night* its character. In Shakespeare, even the twin brother, prop to the plot as he may be, shares in this refinement. When Olivia takes charge of Sebastian's person, what he gives her is less his body than his imagination. He is enwrapped, he says in "wonder." And it is his capacity to experience this wonder that lifts him to the level of the other lovers in the play, so that he becomes a worthy partner for Orsino's adored one and Viola's adorer.

Now if *Twelfth Night* is the greatest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, it is partly because of its success in embodying these feelings of wonder in the principal persons of the play. Stories of romantic love owe something of their perennial appeal, we need not be ashamed to admit, to the taste for tales of pursuit and mysterious adventure, as well as to what psychologists no doubt explain as the sublimation of the natural impulses of sex. But the devotion which the romantic lover bestows upon a woman as pure as she is unattainable may also symbolize the mind's aspiration towards some ever alluring but ever elusive ideal. In the traditional romantic stories the course of true love does not run smooth because of obstacles presented by refractory parents or inconvenient rivals, who have to be overcome or made to change. This is the case in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

There are perhaps subtler situations, where the obstacles exist in the very nature of the protagonists, who must themselves be made to change. This is variously the case in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, where in their very different ways Katherina and the young gentlemen of Navarre are, to begin with, recalcitrant to love. But a still subtler situation may arise with characters who are from the beginning full of devotion to an ideal of love while mistaking the direction in which it should be sought. This, I take it, is the case with Orsino and Olivia. Orsino, with whom *Twelfth Night* begins and who draws us from the start into the aura of his imagination, is in some ways the most perfect of Shakespeare's romantic lovers simply because he is so much more. This is easily appreciated if we compare him with his earlier prototypes in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* He is, as I have suggested, the inconstant Proteus transformed. But he is also the other gentleman, the constant Valentine. He is

> Unstaid and skittish in all motions else
> Save in the constant image of the creature
> That is beloved.

So, simultaneously volatile and steadfast, he combines in a single figure those aspects of man's nature which in the earlier comedy had been systematically contrasted and opposed.

In Valentine, of course, we recognize the typical victim of the passion of courtly love. He tells us himself how he suffers

> With bitter fasts, with penitential groans,
> With nightly tears and daily heartsore sighs.

That these groans and sighs survive in Orsino is clear when Olivia asks "How does he love me?" and the messenger replies,

> With adorations, with[7] fertile tears,
> With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire.

The danger of such a hero is, as Professor Charlton has remarked, that, in fulfilling his conventional role, he may to the quizzical eye seem a fool. Shakespeare guards against this danger by anticipating our ridicule; but his mockery of Valentine and Orsino is quite different in kind. The romantic Valentine is given an unromantic servant who pokes broad fun at his conduct: "to sigh like a schoolboy that has lost his A.B.C.; to weep like a young wench that had buried her grandam; to fast like one that takes diet," and so forth. But Orsino, instead of a servant who laughs at him for loving, has a page who can show him how to do it. "If I did love you in my master's flame," says Cesario, I would

> Make me a willow-cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house

till all the hills reverberated with the name of the beloved. This famous willow-cabin speech, often praised for its lyricism, is of course no less a parody of romantic love than are Speed's gibes at Valentine. The willow is the emblem of forsaken love and those songs that issue from it in the dead of night apostrophising the mistress as her lover's "soul"—they are easily recognizable as the traditional love-laments. But the parody, though it has its hint of laughter, is of the kind that does not belittle but transfigures its original. So it comes as no surprise when Olivia, hitherto heedless of sighs and groans, suddenly starts to listen. To the page she says, "*You* might do much," and these words are her first acknowledgement of love's power. Orsino, content to woo by proxy a woman who immures herself in a seven-year mourning for a dead brother, may have the glamour of a knight of romance but he is *not* quite free from the risk of absurdity.

He seems, they tell us with some justice, in love not so much with a woman as with his own idea of love. But what they do not so often tell us is how splendid an idea this is. His very groans go beyond Valentine's; they were said, it will have been noticed, to *thunder,* and his sighs were *fire.* If he indulges his own emotions, this is in no mere dilettantism but with the avidity of hunger.

> If music be the *food* of love, play on,
> Give me *excess* of it, that *surfeiting,*
> The *appetite* may sicken and so die.

This wonderful opening speech suggests no doubt the changeableness of human emotion. "Play on . . . that strain again! It had a dying fall. . . . Enough, no more! 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before." But if the spirit of love is as transitory as music and as unstable as the sea, it is also as living and capacious. New waves form as often as waves break; the shapes of fancy, insubstantial as they are, make a splendour in the mind, and renew themselves as quickly as they fade. So Orsino's repeated rejections by his mistress do not throw him into despair. Instead he recognizes, in her equally fantastic devotion, a nature of surpassingly "fine frame" and he reflects on how she *will* love when the throne of her heart shall find its "king." How too will *he* love, we are entitled to infer, when his inexhaustible but as yet deluded fancy shall also find the true sovereign it seeks. This of course it does at the end of the play when he exchanges all his dreams of passion for the love of someone he has come to know. In the play's last line before the final song he is able to greet Viola as "Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen."

Before this consummation Orsino and Viola have only one big scene together, and in view of all that depends on it it will need to be a powerful one. Again it finds a model in

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, where already there is a scene in which a man declares his love for one woman in the hearing of another woman who loves *him.* The technique is in each case that of a scene that centres upon a song, which makes a varying impact upon the different characters who hear it. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* a song of adoration to a mistress is presented by a faithless lover and is overheard by the woman he has deserted, while her heartbreak goes undetected by her escort, who calmly falls asleep. This is admirably dramatic, but its irony may seem a trifle obvious when set beside the comparable scene in *Twelfth Night.* The song here is one of forsaken love and it is sung to two constant lovers. Most artfully introduced, it is called for by Orsino, whose request for music sustains the role in which he began the play; and the way in which he calls for the song characterizes both him and it before its opening notes are heard. It is to be an old and antique song, belonging to some primitive age, the kind of song chanted by women at their weaving or their knitting in the sun. It will appeal to Orsino in its simple innocence, or, we may say if we wish, by its ideal immunity from fact. So the rational mind can disengage itself from the sentiment in advance, and as soon as the song is ended its effect is counteracted by the jests of the clown who has sung it and the practical necessity of paying him. Yet the sentiment of the song remains to float back and forth over the dialogue which surrounds it as Orsino and Viola tell us of their love. The contrast here is not, as in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* between the faithful and the faithless, the heartbroken and the heartwhole. It is between one who is eloquent about an imaginary passion and one who suffers a real grief in concealment. Orsino appropriates the song to himself, yet it is Viola who hears in it

a very echo to the seat
Where Love is throned.

Orsino is still sending messages to one he calls his "sovereign," but *his* throne, we may say, is still unoccupied. For his splendid fantasies are as yet self-regarding. When Viola objects, "But if she cannot love you, sir?" he dismisses this with "I cannot be so answered." Yet when she simply retorts, "Sooth, but you must," he receives his first instruction in the necessity of accommodating his fantasies to practical realities. And soon he begins, however unwittingly, to learn. As Viola tells the history of her father's daughter, though he does not see that she is speaking of herself, he finds himself for the first time giving attention to a sorrow not his own. "But died thy sister of her love, my boy?" he asks. To this Viola can only reply, "I know not"; for at this stage in the drama the issue is still in the balance, though Orsino's new absorption in another's plight will provide us with a clue to the outcome. In the very act of sending a fresh embassy to his mistress his thoughts are momentarily distracted from his own affair. When it is necessary for Viola to prompt him—"Sir, shall I to this lady?"—though he rapidly collects himself, we know that his development has begun.

In the emotional pattern of the play Viola represents a genuineness of feeling against which the illusory can be measured. As the go-between she is of course also at the centre of the plot. It is her role to draw Orsino and Olivia from their insubstantial passions and win them to reality. But her impact upon each of them is inevitably different. Orsino, whom she loves but cannot tell her love, responds to her womanly constancy and sentiment; Olivia, whom she cannot love but has to woo, is to be fascinated by her page-boy effrontery and wit.

Now in all the stories of the woman-page who woos for her master and supplants him, the transference of the mistress's affections must be the pivot of the action. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* of course, the lady fails to fall in love with the page at all, which is really a little surprising of her, since she had done so in Shakespeare's source. It is almost as though Shakespeare were reserving this crowning situation, in which the mistress loves the woman-page, for treatment in some later play. At any rate, in *Twelfth Night* he takes care to throw the emphasis upon it from the first. Viola is got into her page-boy clothes before we are half-way through the first act. The plausibility of this, notwithstanding Mrs. Lennox and Dr. Johnson, is not the question. What matters is that the encounter of the lady and the page, upon which the plot is to turn, shall be momentous. And there is no encounter in Shakespeare, not even that of Hamlet with the ghost, which is more elaborately prepared for. Olivia's situation is referred to in each of the first four scenes before she herself appears in the fifth. Out of her love for her dead brother she has abjured the sight of men. This is the plain fact as a plain sea-captain tells it to Viola and us. But in the more embroidered description of one of Orsino's gentlemen we may detect perhaps a hint of the preposterous:

> like a cloistress she will veiled walk
> And water once a day her chamber round
> With eye-offending brine.

In the fanciful Orsino this inspires adoration; but how it may appear to a less poetical nature we may gather from the first words of Sir Toby Belch: "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus?" All these varied views are insinuated naturally into the dialogue, but their cumulative effect is to give Olivia's situation in the round and

to make us curious to see her for ourselves. When after all this she appears, curiosity is not satisfied but intensified; she is not, I think, what we expected. Instead of the veiled lady sprinkling her chamber with tears there enters a mistress commanding her household, and her first words are, "Take the fool away." Equally unexpected is the fool's retort, "Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady." This great dame is called a fool by one of her own attendants, who then goes on to prove it:

Clown. Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
Olivia. Good fool, for my brother's death.
Clown. I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
Olivia. I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
Clown. The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen.

Now this is excellent fooling, but Shakespeare's incidental gaieties have a way of illuminating important matters and our conception of Olivia is one of them. It is only a fool who calls her a fool, but, as the fool himself has suggested, a fool "may pass for a wise man," while those who think they have wit "do very oft prove fools." The question of Olivia's folly remains open. It is kept alive below the surface of the quipping dialogue which entertains us while Olivia defends the fool and is thanked by the fool in characteristically equivocal terms. "Thou hast spoke for us, madonna, as if thy eldest son should be a fool." One could hardly say more than that. Yet the suggestion that her eldest son might be a fool is at best a left-handed compliment. The fool is quick to right it with a prayer that Jove may cram his skull with brains, but it seems that Jove's intervention may be necessary, for—as Sir Toby enters—"one of thy kin has a most weak pia mater." The chances of brains or folly in the skull of any son of Olivia seem then to be about

equal. But what is surely most remarkable is the notion of Olivia's ever having a son at all. We have been made to associate her not with birth but death. The weeping cloistress, as Orsino's gentleman put it, was seasoning a "dead love," and what plagued Sir Toby about this was that care was "an enemy to life." Yet the fool seems to see her as available for motherhood. The remarks of a fool—again—strike as deep as you choose to let them—that is the dramatic use of fools—but Olivia interests us more and more.

By now the page is at the gate. Indeed three different messengers announce him. Sir Toby of the weak pia mater is too drunk to do more than keep us in suspense, but Malvolio precisely catalogues the young man's strange behaviour, till we are as curious to see him as is Olivia herself. "Tell him he shall not speak with me," she has insisted; but when this changes to "Let him approach," the first of her defences is down. Our interest in each of them is now at such a height that the moment of their meeting cannot fail to be electric.

How different all this is from what happened in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* where only a single soliloquy prepared us before the page and Sylvia just came together pat. But it is interesting to see how the seeds strewn in the earlier play now germinate in Shakespeare's mature inventiveness. When the page came upon Sylvia, he did not know who she was and actually asked her to direct him to herself. This confusion gave a momentary amusement and the dramatic importance of the encounter was faintly underlined. But as Sylvia at once disclosed her identity, this little gambit came to nothing. In *Twelfth Night,* however, Cesario only pretends not to recognize Olivia so as to confound her with his raillery. "Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty," he begins and then breaks off to enquire whether the lady

before him is the radiant unmatchable or not. As he has never seen her, how can he possibly tell? This opens up a brilliant series of exchanges in the course of which the familiar moves of the conventional courtship are all similarly transformed. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Proteus was simply following the usual pattern of suitors when he instructed the page,

> Give her that ring and therewithal
> This letter . . . Tell my lady
> I claim the promise for her heavenly picture.

To be fair, even in this early play the conventional properties, the ring, the letter, and the picture, each made a dramatic point: for Sylvia recognized the ring as that of her rival and so refused to accept it, while she tore the letter up; and if she compliantly handed over her portrait, she was careful to add the comment that a picture was only a shadow and might appropriately be given for a fickle lover to worship. But in *Twelfth Night* the letter, the picture, and the ring are changed almost out of recognition. Shakespeare's superbly original invention allows Orsino to dispense with them; yet they are all vestigially present. Instead of bearing missives, the page is given the task of acting out his master's woes, and so instead of the lover's own letter we are to have the page's speech. This cunningly diverts attention from the message to the messenger, and the effect is still further enhanced when even the speech never gets delivered apart from its opening words. Instead there is talk about the speech—how "excellently well penn'd," how "poetical" it is—and are you really the right lady so that I may not waste the praise I have taken such pains to compose? Olivia in turn delights us by matching Cesario's mockery, but as we watch them finesse about how and even whether the speech

shall be delivered, their mocking dialogue says more than any formal speech could say. In fact the very circumventing of the speech brings them to the heart of its forbidden theme. And so we come to the picture. There is of course no picture, any more than there was a letter; but the convention whereby the lover asks for a picture of his mistress is made to provide a metaphor through which the witty duel may proceed. Olivia draws back the curtain and reveals a picture, they talk of the colours that the artist's "cunning hand laid on," and Cesario asks for a copy. But the curtain Olivia draws back is her own veil, the artist is Nature, and the copy of Nature's handiwork will come as the fruit of marriage. Again the suggestion that Olivia could have a child. The cloistress who dedicates herself to the dead is reminded of the claims of life. She waves them aside for the moment by deftly changing the application of the metaphor. Certainly there shall be a copy of her beauty; why not an inventory of its items? As she catalogues them—"two lips, indifferent red . . . two grey eyes, with lids to them"—she ridicules the wooer's praises; but at the same time, it may not be too much to suggest, she robs her womanhood of its incipient animation. Yet the cloistress has removed her veil and presently there is the ring. Orsino again sent no ring, but that need not prevent Olivia from returning it. And with this ruse the ring no less than the picture takes on a new significance. By means of it Olivia rejects Orsino's love but at the same time declares her own. And as Malvolio flings the ring upon the stage it makes its little dramatic *éclat*.

Shakespeare's portrait of Olivia has usually, I think, been underrated. The critics who used to talk about Shakespeare's heroines fell in love with Viola, and actresses have naturally preferred the bravura of her essentially easier role. Besides

there is the risk of the ridiculous about a woman who mistakenly loves one of her own sex. But the delicacy of Shakespeare's handling, once more in contrast with that of his predecessors, steers the situation right away from farce and contrives to show, through her potentially absurd and undisguisedly pathetic plight, the gradual awakening of that noble nature which Orsino detected from the first. We have still permission to laugh at her. The fool, reminding us that foolery like the sun shines everywhere, flits between Orsino's house and hers. But when he is called the Lady Olivia's fool he makes one of his astonishing replies. "No indeed, sir. The Lady Olivia has no folly." It is true that his remark is as usual double-edged. "She will keep no fool, sir, till she be married." Her present exemption, it would seem, lies in her not having yet secured the husband she is seeking. But when the fool now tells us that the Lady Olivia has no folly, we are forcibly reminded that he began by proving her a fool. It seems clear she is making progress. The comic artist only hints this with a lightness which the heavy hand of the critic inevitably destroys; but is there not the suggestion that when Olivia ceases to mourn the dead and gives herself to the pursuit of the living, she has advanced some small way towards wisdom?

There is one character in the play who, unlike Olivia and Orsino, is unable to make this journey. And that brings me to the subplot. For it will already be apparent that I do not agree with a recent paper in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* which makes Malvolio the central figure of the play.[8] The mistake is not a new one. The record of a court performance in the year of the First Folio actually calls the play *Malvolio* and there are other seventeenth-century references, beginning with Manningham in 1602, which go to show

that the sublime swagger with which Malvolio walks into the box-hedge trap to emerge in yellow stockings was largely responsible, then as now, for the play's theatrical popularity. The distortion of emphasis this implies is a tribute to Shakespeare's invention of the most novel situation in the play, but if I venture to suggest that it does no great credit to his audience, no doubt some one will rise up like Sir Toby and ask me, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" All I think is that the cake-and-ale jollifications are very jolly indeed so long as they stay, whether in criticism or performance, within the bounds of a subplot, which the whole technique of the dramatic exposition marks them out to be. These more hilarious goings-on make an admirable counterweight to the more fragile wit and sentiment of which the main plot is woven; but attention is firmly directed to the love-story of Orsino, Olivia, and Viola before Sir Toby and Malvolio are heard of, and the courtships are well in progress by the time we come to the midnight caterwaulings. So the love-delusions of Malvolio, brilliant as they are, fall into perspective as a parody of the more delicate aberrations of his mistress and her suitor. Like them Malvolio aspires towards an illusory ideal of love, but his mistake is a grosser one than theirs, his posturings more extravagant and grotesque. So *his* illusion enlarges the suggestions of the main plot about the mind's capacity for self-deception and if, as Lamb maintained,[9] it gives Malvolio a glory such as no mere reason can attain to, still "lunacy" was one of Lamb's words for it and it is to the madman's dungeon that it leads.

Malvolio's fate, like Falstaff's, has been much resented by the critics. But drama, as Aristotle indicated and Shakespeare evidently perceived, is not quite the same as life,

and punishments that in life would seem excessive have their place in the more ideal world of art. In the ethical scheme of comedy, it may be the doom of those who cannot correct themselves to be imprisoned or suppressed. Olivia and Prince Hal, within their vastly different realms, have shown themselves capable of learning, as Malvolio and Falstaff have not.

The comparison between Olivia and Malvolio is one that the play specifically invites. He is the trusted steward of her household, and he suits her, she says, by being "sad and civil." This reminds us that it was with her authority that he descended on the midnight revels to quell that "uncivil rule." Have you no manners, he demands of Sir Toby and his crew; and his rebuke is one that Olivia herself will echo later when she calls Sir Toby a barbarian fit to dwell in "caves Where manners ne'er were preached." But if Olivia and Malvolio are united in seeking to impose an ordered regimen on these unruly elements, that does not mean, though I have found it said, that they share a doctrine of austerity.[10] Indeed the resemblance between them serves to bring out a distinction that is fundamental to the play. It is clearly marked for us on their first appearance. Significantly enough, they are brought on the stage together and placed in the same situation, as if to attract our attention to their contrasting reactions. The first remark of each of them is one of dissatisfaction with the fool, and the fool's retaliation is first to prove Olivia a fool and then to call Malvolio one. But Olivia is amused and Malvolio is not. "I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal." What Olivia delights in, Malvolio finds barren. "Doth he not mend?" she says, suggesting that the fool is getting wittier. But Malvolio rejoins, Yes, he is mending by becoming a more perfect fool—"and

shall do till the pangs of death shake him." Olivia too has given her thoughts to death, but whereas she mourns the dead, prettily if absurdly, Malvolio threatens the living in words which betray a cruel relish. This is his first speech in the play and it carries a corresponding emphasis. There are already signs that Olivia may be won from death to life, but the spirit of Malvolio can only be destructive. To say this is again to put it more portentously than it is the nature of comedy to do, but it is Olivia, not Malvolio, whom the comic dialogue invites to have a son, with brains in his skull or otherwise.

The difference in their natures appears in various subtle ways, and I will cite just one example. When Olivia sends after Cesario with the ring, the message that she sends is,

> If that the youth will come this way tomorrow,
> I'll give him reasons for't.

But Malvolio, who bears the message, translates it thus:

> Be never so hardy to come again in his affairs, unless it be to report your lord's taking of this.

It is true that Malvolio cannot know, as we do, the secret meaning of the ring, but that hardly leaves him guiltless when he replaces "if" by "unless" and a positive by a negative: "If that the youth will come . . .," "Be never so hardy to come . . . unless. . . ." An invitation has become a warning off.

As the action proceeds, Olivia opens her heart to the new love that is being born within her, but Malvolio is only confirmed in that sickness of self-love of which she has accused him. At the height of his love-dream, his imaginings are all of his own advancement—"sitting in my state," "in my branched velvet gown," "calling my officers about me" as I "wind up my watch or play with my—some rich jewel."[11] When he showed resentment at the fool, Olivia reproached

Malvolio for his lack of generosity and now his very words freeze every generous impulse—"I frown the while," "quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control."[12] This is not the language of Olivia. She speaks of the impossibility of quenching those natural feelings which rise up within her, and which we are made to recognize even in the comicality of her predicament:

> Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
> By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
> I love thee so that maugre all thy pride,
> No wit nor reason can my passion hide.

So Olivia, notwithstanding her mistakes, is allowed to find a husband while Malvolio is shut up in the dark.

The ironic fitness of Malvolio's downfall is dramatically underscored in every detail of his situation. When he dreamed of his own greatness he pictured Sir Toby coming to him with a curtsey and he told Sir Toby to amend his drunkenness: it is now his bitterest complaint that this drunken cousin has been given rule over him. When he rebuked the tipsy revellers, he began, "My masters, are you mad?" and their revenge upon him is to make it seem that he is mad himself. Particularly instructive is the leading part taken in his torment by the fool he began the play by spurning. The fool taunts him in the darkness of the dungeon and he begs the fool to help him to some light. It is to the fool that the man contemptuous of fools is now made to plead his own sanity. But his insistence on his sanity—"I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art"—leaves the matter in some ambiguity, as the fool very promptly retorts: "Then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool." And Malvolio ends the play as he began by being called a fool. And if at first it was only the fool who called him so, now it is his mistress herself. Even as she pities him for the

trick that has been played on him, "Alas, poor fool" are the words that Shakespeare puts into her mouth.

What then is folly and what wisdom, the comedy seems to ask. The question first appeared in that early cross-talk with the fool which brought Olivia into contrast with Malvolio even while we were awaiting her reception of Cesario. So that the manner in which Malvolio's story is begun clearly puts it into relation with the main plot of the wooing. And of course it is only appropriate that scenes of romantic love should be surrounded by a comic dialogue which gaily tosses off its hints about whether these characters are fools. For the pursuit of the ideal life is not quite compatible with reason. And, as another of Shakespeare's comedies puts it, those who in imagination see more than "reason ever comprehends" are the lover, the poet, and the lunatic. So where does the noble vision end and the madman's dream begin? The greatness and the folly that lie in the mind of man are inextricably entangled and the characters in *Twelfth Night* have each their share of both. Malvolio's moment of lunacy may be, as Lamb suggests, the moment of his glory. Yet Malvolio, so scornful of the follies of others, would persuade us that his own are sane. His sanity is indeed established, but only to leave us wondering whether sanity may not sometimes be the greater folly. What the comedy *may* suggest is that he who in his egotism seeks to fit the world to the procrustean bed of his own reason deserves his own discomfiture. But Olivia, who self-confessedly abandons reason, and Orsino, who avidly gives his mind to all the shapes of fancy, are permitted to pass through whatever folly there may be in this to a greater illumination. Although what they sought has inevitably eluded them, it has nevertheless been vouchsafed to them in another form.

Yet it is the art of Shakespeare's comedy, and perhaps also its wisdom, to make no final judgments. The spirit of the piece, after all, is that of Twelfth Night and it is in the ideal world of Twelfth Night that Malvolio may be justly punished. Perhaps we should also remember, as even the Twelfth Night lovers do, to pause, if only for a moment, to recognize his precisian virtues. Olivia agrees with him that he has been "notoriously abused" and the poet-lover Orsino sends after him to "entreat him to a peace," before they finally enter into the happiness to which "golden time" will summon them. "Golden time"—the epithet is characteristically Orsino's. It is only the wise fool who stays to sing to us about the rain that raineth every day.

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NOTES

1. *The First Night of "Twelfth Night,"* 1954, p. 97.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
3. *Shakespear Illustrated,* 1753, I, 237ff.
4. For a survey and discussion of them, see Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources,* 1957, pp. 66ff. The more important ones are now assembled in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,* ed. Geoffrey Bullough, Vol. 2, 1958.
5. *Twelfth Night,* Variorum Edition, p. xvii.
6. I follow the emendation of Theobald, adopted by most editors, for the Folio *on't.*
7. Folio omits *with.*
8. Milton Crane, *"Twelfth Night* and Shakespearean Comedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* VI (1955). *Cf.* also Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare,* 1939, p. 169: "The center is Malvolio."
9. In his account of Bensley's Malvolio in the essay "On Some of the Old Actors."
10. See especially M. P. Tilley, "The Organic Unity of *Twelfth Night,*" *PMLA,* XXIX (1914).
11. *Cf.* John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies,* 1957, p. 167.
12. On the style of Malvolio's speeches, see Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare,* 1939, p. 167.